MODERN HORN TRIOS

Abrahamsen · Cage · Koechlin
Schröder · Ligeti

PŘEMYSL VOJTA · YE WU
FLORENCE MILLET

WDR THE COLOGNE BROADCASTS

HANS ABRAHAMSEN (*1952)

Seks Stykker / Six Pieces, for Horn, Violin and Piano (1984)

1	0	Serenade	03:49
2	1	Blues	02:15
3	2	Arabesque	01:59
4	3	Marcia funebre	03:36
5	4	Scherzo misterioso	02:27
6	5	For the children	01:30

JOHN CAGE (1912-1992)

7		Music for Three (1984-87) Version for Violin, Horn and Piano*	05:09

CHARLES KOECHLIN (1867-1950)

Quatre Petites Pièces, Op. 32 (1920)

8	1	Andante	03:02
9	2	Très modéré	02:17
10	3	Allegretto quasi andantino	02:19
11	4	Scherzando	01:05

HERMANN SCHROEDER (1904-1984)

Trio No. 2, for Horn, Violin and Piano, Op. 40 (1967)*

12	I	Andante sostenuto	04:40
13	II	Adagio	05:25
14	III	Presto scherzando	03:29

GYÖRGY LIGETI (1923-2006)

Trio for Horn, Violin and Piano (1982)

15	I	Andantino con tenerezza	06:57
16	II	Vivacissimo molto ritmico	05:21
17	III	Alla marcia	03:13
18	IV	Lamento. Adagio	08:35

Total Time 67:10

* World Premiere Recordings

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WDR, Klaus-von-Bismarck-Saal, Köln/Germany

Executive Producer: Harry Vogt

Recording Producer: Stephan Hahn

Recording Eengineers:
Arnd Coppers, Enrique Foedtke

Recording Assistant:
Angelika Hessberger

Piano Technicians:
Martin Lintzen, Paul Müller

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Danish composer **Hans Abrahamsen** wrote his ***Seks Stykker*** for horn, violin, and piano in 1984 on the occasion of a National Radio concert featuring the Danish première of György Ligeti's *Horn Trio*. Abrahamsen is one those few composers who actually studied the horn at conservatory, and the instrument thus often appears in his scores, with particular prominence in his chamber music. Abrahamsen used his *Studies for Piano* as a point of departure for the horn trio, but he does not necessarily adopt the role of a "horn player who composes."

Přemysl Vojta: I don't find that he strongly favors the horn. He was searching for certain tone colors, a certain character, and the horn was a means toward achieving them. Moreover, the *Seks Stykker* do not require the same degree of virtuosity as the Ligeti trio. Here, instead, we are dealing with the description of moods. You can truly imagine you are walking through nature, perceiving a multitude of colors and listening to birdsong. The work is so richly textured that you almost forget that there are only three musicians playing.

Florence Millet: Abrahamsen used his early *Studies for Piano* as a basis for the *Seks Stykker*; he took the original ideas in other directions, quite poetically, applying a vast palette of colors and imagination. You hear the motifs, rhythms, and melodies from the Piano Studies in another way here; you have a *Scherzo misterioso* atmosphere similar to Ligeti. For instance, Abrahamsen modifies accentuation and dynamics. The same occurs with tempo, which obviously affects a piece's character. You feel as if you are setting foot on an entirely different world. Abrahamsen didn't use all the piano études: only six of them, and he placed them in another order that ends up sounding entirely logical. I have the greatest admiration for this feat, reminiscent of Zimmermann, Berio, and Schöllhorn, who took earlier works and were capable of reconstructing and reorchestrating them, turning them into something entirely different.

Ye Wu: We had the privilege of rehearsing the piece live in Abrahamsen's presence and were thus able to gain a better grasp of what he had intended when he wrote this music: it's actually not so far removed from our classical approach to music. Abrahamsen is dealing with emotions, with what he wants to express. If I manage to feel the same kind of emotion and try to imagine how I would present it, then it all works quite naturally. In the Arabesque, I found we might be able to play a bit more freely in terms of tempo, leaning a bit forward or backward and making it sound more elastic. I liked that effect, and indeed, that's exactly what Abrahamsen had in mind.

John Cage opens up a new perspective on the subject of the horn trio. Cage's *Music for Three* embodies one of the possibilities of performing his "Music for..." a collection of 17 parts that can be assembled in any possible combination: each combination is a fully valid version of the "work". Cage's "Music for..." is governed by a seemingly strict time coordination system: as performers, we are always following the timer, which plays an essential role. Cage defined a series of time brackets within which the individual voices, or parts, are to play brief components, often only fragments or even individual notes. But the performers still have total freedom to decide how these elements are concretely presented within the predefined time intervals. Cage would later use the same time bracket principle as a central element in his *Number Pieces*.

Florence Millet: We have to thank the editor and producer for contemporary music at WDR, Cologne, Harry Vogt, for having led us to discover Cage's *Music for Three*. Its inclusion allows us to achieve a well-proportioned contrast among five different personalities whose style and world view reflect a wide array of different approaches, which is what we were seeking to achieve on this CD.

The combination of pieces of *Music for Three* by Cage featured on this CD serve as an appetizer for a further CD with our trio, exclusively devoted to *Music for Three*.

Musical quality was the ensemble's principal criterion in selecting repertoire for this CD, and they found a wonderful example in a work by French composer **Charles Koechlin**. Koechlin was born in Paris in 1867 as the son of an affluent Alsatian family. He started to study engineering, but in the early 1890s he chose music instead. At the Paris Conservatoire he became of a student of Jules Massenet, later of Gabriel Fauré. During those years of study, he wrote the ***Quatre petites pièces*** for horn trio, blending passionate expression with almost laconically slick melodic lines. Each movement is based on a simple ABA structure, filled out with a great degree of harmonic refinement.

After intense research and preliminary tryouts, the ensemble also chose to include the ***Second Trio for Horn, Violin and Piano op. 40*** by former Cologne Conservatory professor **Hermann Schroeder**. Written in 1967, the piece is retrospectively oriented toward the style of early 20th-century composers such as Paul Hindemith and Richard Strauss.

Florence Millet: We read through a great number of scores, attempting to achieve a comprehensive overview of the genre of trio with violin, horn and piano in all its variety and quality ever since Brahms inaugurated it. Schroeder's trio started to raise some thorny issues when we found out that prior to his post in Cologne he had enjoyed a certain degree of sympathy and admiration on the part of Nazi party circles. The worst thing we could do now would be to gloss over those circumstances and not address them, as apparently happened in music circles in the 1960s. Hermann Schroeder actively and harshly attacked musical modernists within the Conservatory and on the concert scene: all three of us reject that stance with the same degree of vehemence and critical distance. Schroeder's colleague Bernd Alois Zimmermann was one of the musicians who particularly suffered under those attacks. After a great deal of deliberation and discussion, we have decided to distinguish between Hermann Schroeder as a human being and the music he produced, and we have chosen to include his trio in our programme.

"When he pronounced the word 'horn,' somewhere in my head I started hearing the timbre of a horn as if it was floating over to me from a distant fairy-tale forest, as in a poem by Eichendorff," said **György Ligeti** referring to the genesis of his ***Trio for Horn, Violin and Piano***. The person who had started talking about the horn was Hamburg pianist and professor Eckart Besch. It was Besch who gave Ligeti the idea of writing a horn trio to continue a tradition that had been inaugurated by one of the great masterpieces of chamber music: Johannes Brahms's *Horn Trio, op. 40*. Anticipating the celebration of Brahms's 150th birthday, Ligeti's *Horn Trio* was given its world premiere in Hamburg on 7 August 1982 at Bergedorf Castle in the hands of violinist Saschko Gawriloff, pianist Eckart Besch, and horn player Hermann Baumann.
The connection with Brahms's *Horn Trio* is indisputable, and Ligeti made it clear by choosing the subtitle *Hommage à Brahms*. Nevertheless, Ligeti's horn trio did not represent a shift towards musical Classicism, although Ligeti would indeed be accused of becoming a Classicist in the course of the 1980s.

Florence Millet: When I was a student at the Paris Conservatoire, I recall that the composition class was thrilled to receive the visit of György Ligeti, who had just finished writing his horn trio. I had previously heard his *Grand Macabre*, which I admired as an impressive eruption of boldness and audacity. That was how we saw Ligeti back then. Why couldn't we allow him the freedom of surprising us in a different way? The *Horn Trio* was like a premonition of the impending reappearance of beauty in new music. Ligeti's horn trio is incredibly refined in terms of structure and compositional technique, and it has a series of truly challenging virtuoso rhythms. Still, the music ultimately comes from the heart and from the gut: such a move was truly courageous back then in the 1980s.
Ye Wu: While preparing this piece with my colleagues, I have deliberately avoided listening to other recordings of Ligeti's *Horn Trio*; instead, I've attempted to approach this piece with an unencumbered

attitude. Our recording manages to preserve that "live" feeling, with all its contrasts and colors. For instance, in the first movement I use as little vibrato as possible, since the horn cannot vibrate like a violin usually does. Others have surely done this differently, but I find that every recording should be something quite personal.

Přemysl Vojta: Ligeti's trio is not only similar to Brahms's op. 40 in terms of number and extension of movements: there are so many parallels in terms of structure and character that it cannot be a coincidence. Brahms composed the elegiac Adagio movement shortly after his mother's death, and Ligeti may have written the Lamento in memory of the Holocaust – a subject that haunted him during his entire life, since his father and his brother were both murdered by the Nazis. Brahms's dance-like scherzo is mirrored in Ligeti's second movement: a crazy dance that blends Balkan and South American folklore, throwing those two styles in a completely new light. Apart from all these features, Ligeti's trio is certainly one of the most difficult pieces in horn repertoire, with a series of specific challenges in store for the performer. To my knowledge, Ligeti was the first composer to have used the row of natural harmonics so thoroughly in classical music: in this sense, this work is a pivotal milestone, elevating the horn to a new rank.

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Přemysl Vojta, winner of the „International ARD Music Competition" 2010, tours worldwide as a soloist with orchestras such as the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra, the Camerata Salzburg, the Academy of St Martin in the Fields, the Prague Philharmonia and the Kanagawa Symphony Orchestra. After his successful debut at the Beethoven Festival in Bonn, Přemysl was awarded the prestigious Beethoven Ring, past recipients of which include artists such as Igor Levit, Lisa Batiashvili and Gustavo Dudamel. Přemysl Vojta has received much international acclaim for his exceptional album productions, including one complete recording of the horn concertos by Joseph and Michael Haydn, and his album *Metamorphosis*, which was recorded using three different types of horns.

In October 2021, Přemysl Vojta was appointed as a professor of horn at Folkwang University of the Arts in Essen to succeed the horn legends Hermann Baumann and Frank Lloyd. In the past, he has also taught at Berlin University of the Arts and the Cologne University of Music and Dance.

At the age of 10, Přemysl Vojta received his first horn education from Olga Voldánová at the Brno Music School. A talented competitive swimmer at the time, Vojta had to choose between sports and music, but soon enough, his heart was set on the instrument. Later, he pursed his studies at the Prague Conservatory under the mentorship of Bedřich Tylšar (1998-2004) and at Berlin University of the Arts under Christian – Friedrich Dallmann (2004-2010). While he was a student, Přemysl Vojta had already started his career as a principal hornist at the Berlin Konzerthaus Orchestra, and continued holding the same position at the WDR Symphony Orchestra in Cologne until 2019.

Vojta is a member of the Carousel Ensemble, PhilHarmonia Octets, Breeze Quintets and Dispar Trios. His chamber music partners include Tobias Koch, Annelien van Wauwe, Fabrice Millischer, Oliver Triendl, the Pražák Quartet and the Armida Quartet.

Přemysl Vojta plays a Mod. 3 double horn from Klaus Fehr Horns, natural horns from Jungwirth and Curtois Paris and the F horn by Daniel Fuchs Vienna.

www.premyslvojta.com

YE WU Violin

Chinese violinist Ye Wu took her first violin lessons in her home town Shanghai before continuing her studies in the USA as well as in Berlin. As concertmaster, she has been invited to perform with many orchestras, playing under such conductors as Kurt Masur, Kent Nagano and Christoph Eschenbach. She has performed extensively in America and Europe as a soloist.

Ye Wu has attracted attention with numerous recordings and concerts as a chamber musician, particularly in recent years as Primaria of the WDR Chamber Players. In 2017 their recording of the string quintets by Johannes Brahms, released by the Pentatone label, was awarded the Diapason d'Or. Their newest CD of the string quintets and octet by Max Bruch was rewarded the Choc de Classica in 2021.

Since 2014 she has been second concertmaster in the WDR Symphony Orchestra Cologne. Ye Wu plays a Joseph Rocca violin (1851), on loan from Mr. Jianquan Ge and Mr. Peng Bai.

FLORENCE MILLET Piano

Florence Millet, of Franco-German descent, performs with orchestra, in recitals and ensembles in venues across Europe, Asia and the Americas. Conductors she worked with are Charles Dutoit, Robert Kapilow, Pascal Verrot, Simon Blech, Heinz Holliger, Julia Jones, Elena Schwartz, Jonathan Darlington. She is a founding member of the Lions Gate Trio, since 1988. Residencies include Tanglewood Festival, Universities of North-Carolina-Greensboro, Yale, W. Hartford and the Fairfield Library, CT. A professor at the Hochschule für Musik und Tanz Köln, she was Chair of the Piano Department from 2018 and was elected Executive Director of its Wuppertal Campus in 2021.

She has worked worked closely with renowned composers: Luciano Berio, Elliott Carter, Pierre Boulez, George Crumb, Johannes Schöllhorn, Jörg Widmann, Hans Werner Henze, Hans Abrahamsen. She played with the Ensemble Intercontemporain under Pierre Boulez and David Robertson from 1992-2000.

Millet received her master's and doctoral degrees at State University of New York Stony Brook, where she studied with Gilbert Kalish. Her other mentors were Leon Fleisher, Paul Badura Skoda, Peter Serkin and Jean Hubeau.
Florence Millet is the artistic adviser for the Lichterfeld Foundation, promoting tolerance, intercultural understanding and creator of the Echospore.de platform which propagates music from persecuted composers.

She explores multidisciplinary concert formats with actors, choreography and dance (Tanztheater Wuppertal Pina Bausch) and arts in the Tony Cragg Foundation, Van der Heydt-Museum, The Phillips Collection, „Rundgang" Musik der Zeit 70. anniversary or in lecture recitals.

www.florencemillet.com

PŘEMYSL VOJTA Horn
YE WU Violin
FLORENCE MILLET Piano